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DIRECTED TEACHING AND DIRECTED OBSERVATION —A CORRECTION AND AN EXPLANATION

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In a recent article on the "Reorganization of Teacher Training in German in Our Colleges and Universities"¹ Mr. John C. Weigel, of the University of Chicago, makes reference to and attempts to explain the system of teacher training in operation at the University of Wisconsin. Because his statements seem to give an entirely wrong impression, and because his understanding of our work here appears either to be based upon a misconception or to go back to a condition which no longer exists, I may be permitted to state briefly what we are undertaking to do in training teachers of German. I shall refer particularly to our plan for securing practical classroom activity on the part of candidates, and shall in no sense seek at this time to give a systematic exposition of our entire teacher-training organization.

Mr. Weigel calls the Wisconsin plan "directed observation," and proceeds in his explanatory paragraph to outline rather vaguely what we very carefully designate "directed teaching," in order not to confuse it with our directed and supervised *observation* work, which is supplementary to and in no way a substitute for directed teaching.

Near the close of this same paragraph Mr. Weigel says:

It is because of this fact [viz., that the instructor under whom the work is done may not be competent to direct the student successfully] that a course such as "The Teaching of German in Secondary Schools" is absolutely essential. Such a course does inform the prospective teacher in some specific way why certain types of stimuli are advisable and others not. Without such a course teaching becomes very largely imitative, which isn't bad; only it isn't enough. Any scheme of teacher training that does not include such a supplementary course as this obviously fails to produce maximum results.

¹ *Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik*, XVII, 16-20, 34-44.

The implication would clearly seem to be that no such course is offered at Wisconsin in addition to the practical work: a thing which Mr. Weigel, of course, would never have implied intentionally. It is unfortunate that such a misleading statement should have been made in this connection. As a matter of fact, the teacher who has actual charge of the classroom work in directed teaching and observation both gives the course in methods (one semester, two hours) and teaches demonstration classes in the Wisconsin High School of the University of Wisconsin. Thus it will be seen that the work is made as unified as possible and is not at all one-sided.

As to directed teaching, a statement of its general aims and principles which is fairly accurate is to be found in an editorial in the *School Review*, XXIII, 199-200, although here, also, the misnomer "observation" is applied. It has been our custom to avoid detailed and formal statements as to what directed teaching is, because of the fact that it is new and is constantly undergoing improvement; hence it would be extremely unfortunate if we should incur the danger of checking this growth by defining our practice so narrowly as to give ourselves a thesis to defend. While leaving the fuller statement that eventually will be made for abler hands, I may venture to give a general outline of the process in our modern language work, and this conforms fairly well to what is done by other departments.

"Education A" or "Educational Practice" is a separate course in the Department of Education, and is usually taken either in the same semester as the departmental teachers' course or in the semester following. Ordinarily the student is in the Senior year. The course begins, as at present arranged, with a series of introductory lectures given by the principal of the Wisconsin High School to the candidates of all departments. These candidates are then assigned to various classes of the school for a period of eight weeks each, which term may be increased to sixteen under certain specified conditions. At this point the demonstration teacher and the principal of the school assume joint charge of the work. The candidates are furnished class lists and are required in the shortest possible time to familiarize themselves thoroughly with names and

seating order. At the same time they devote their attention intensively to the subject-matter in hand, and are required to prepare each assignment made in as thorough a manner as possible.

This preliminary work over, the student begins to take an active part in the conduct of the class. Without going farther into detail, the progress is from isolated questions of a simple nature, through short, easy drill exercises which the class can do with the minimum of direction, to more difficult drill material, and finally to the presentation of new material. Unrelenting insistence is put upon the development of a sensible, analytical teacher-attitude. The creation or improvement of a teaching personality capable of intelligent growth is made the chief aim, above all aims as to method or subject-matter in the narrower sense.

The viewpoint is that neither scholarship tested in a set of academic relations nor methodology detached from practical circumstances, is adequate to the needs of the future professional worker in secondary education. Test him in the environment of actual teaching, and thereby discover ability to take the *next* step in a progressing series of unique circumstances wherein the process (teaching) remains inventive all the way. No formal teaching technique is emphasized. The rigid and somewhat protracted discipline under the master teacher is designed to render the progress of the future high school teacher toward successful accomplishment more rapid, more economical, and more confident than it otherwise would be.¹

In the drill exercises the student is scarcely ever warned beforehand, as the understanding is clear that there must be constant and thorough preparation. For the presentation of new material, and for the conducting of an entire class period, usually previous warning is given and the candidate is assisted in working out a lesson plan. The demonstration teacher is at liberty to use his judgment as to whether an unsuccessful effort on the part of the candidate is to be interrupted and guided into a successful course, or broken off entirely. The interests of the class are never allowed to suffer in the least, as that would imperil our whole system. A failure on the part of the candidate one day may pave the way to success the next, and in the beginning more importance is attached to frequent short exercises than to less frequent long

¹ From a syllabus by Professor H. L. Miller, principal of the Wisconsin High School.

attempts. The progress from simple to complex exercises is made as gradual as possible.

It is out of the question for me here to go into the infinite possibilities of tactful suggestion, guidance, and correction, both as to subject-matter and method, as well as personal attitude. Suffice it to say that there is no sentimental sparing of a candidate's feelings, although every effort is made to keep the criticisms just and constructive. The daily written analyses of the recitation period are made the basis of frequent conferences of five or ten minutes, and the instructor or supervisor writes brief comments on the margins of the daily report cards, or on separate sheets, all of which are then filed in a cabinet provided for the purpose, and gone over regularly by the students. It is not necessary to say that these comments are eagerly awaited by the students, and we try to allow no delay in the reading and filing of the reports. The custom of having the reports handed to the demonstration teacher at the next following recitation aids in securing a prompt reading and criticism.

This directed *teaching* is all done in the Wisconsin High School. The directed and supervised *observation*, on the other hand, is done both here and in the Madison High School. The latter is in no sense a special course, but is a part of the departmental teachers' course, and time is allowed for it as for other preparation work assigned the class. I shall not describe in detail what was done this year, as modifications are already under way which, if completed, will make the conduct of the work somewhat different. Moreover, the work of the various departments has not been unified to any considerable extent in the observation of recitations, and what was done in German is not representative of the other departments. My only purpose here is to distinguish this observation work from the directed teaching described briefly above. The following gives a general idea of the nature of this work. The students were assigned definitely for a fairly large number of observations to each of as many teachers as our present arrangements made possible. They were required to report daily and in minute detail, according to an outline furnished by the university

instructor, on the progress of the recitation, giving devices, materials and subject-matter. The university instructor was constantly in touch with the work observed, and students were not permitted to hand in mere generalizations. The same system of reports was used as for the directed teaching, and they were gone over both by the teacher observed and the university instructor. There was no active participation in the class exercises. Comparisons of teachers observed were not allowed on the reports for obvious reasons, but candidates were urged to make comparisons in their own minds and to have grounds for the decisions reached. Insistence was put upon the use of politeness and tact toward the teachers of the demonstration classes, and not a single case of offense was reported, although this had been urged as a serious danger in such a system. It is my hope at some later time to present the results of this plan in detail, with samples of the reports and comments of the students. It has proved a valuable asset to teacher training.

The foregoing paragraphs will explain fully such statements in Mr. Weigel's article as: "Sometimes this work on the part of the student teacher is spontaneous and sometimes prepared," or: "The student may be asked to plan a lesson," statements which, without such explanation, would probably give to some the impression of a haphazard scheme without definite aim or value. It will also be clear that no student takes Education A without also taking a teachers' course in methods, texts, organization, etc. It might be added that a semester two-hour course in phonetics, a year two-hour course in advanced composition, one advanced literary course, and an elementary course in philology are required of major students by the Department of German, as a complement to which considerable work in general education courses is prescribed for all candidates for the university teachers' certificate.

The value of this additional training is so recognized by the students themselves that only a negligible number of Juniors majoring in German failed to enrol this year for the university teachers' certificate, which enrolment is a prerequisite for admission to Educational Practice next year. Those not so enrolling

are offered a limited opportunity for actual classroom experience in certain beginners' sections in the university proper.

As indicated before, this brief summary will serve as an introduction to later, more detailed discussions of this plan of training teachers. In the meantime, whatever questions as to detail are raised in the minds of those interested may be referred to Professor H. L. Miller, principal of the Wisconsin High School, who is in general charge of Educational Practice. Questions pertaining specifically to German or French may be referred to the writer.